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Huong, Tran Van

R

Saigon 2286

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ACTION SS 70

INFO 2070 W

R 021315Z AUG 67
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC FOR POLAD
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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8/24/67

S E C R E T SAIGON 2286

LIMDIS

REFS: SAIGON 1681 Pol 14 Viet S

SUBJECT: VIEWS OF TRAN VAN HUONG

1. MORNING AUGUST 2 TRAN VAN HUONG TOLD EMBOFF WITH OBVIOUS SATISFACTION THAT DUONG VAN MINH 'BIG MINH' HAS COME OUT IN SUPPORT OF HIS CANDIDACY. HE EXPLAINED THAT A WESTERN CORRESPONDENT INTERVIEWED MINH IN BANGKOK, AND THE STORY WAS THEN

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BROUGHT BACK TO SAIGON. MRS. MINH ALSO CALLED ON HIM, AND THEY HAD A LONG CONVERSATION BEFORE HER DEPARTURE FOR BANGKOK. (SEVERAL VIETNAMESE PAPERS APPEARING ON THE MORNING OF AUGUST 2 CARRIED AN ACCOUNT OF AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN AN ABC REPORTER AND BIG MINH IN WHICH MINH IS QUOTED AS SAYING HE SUPPORTS HUONG. SOME OF THE SAME PAPERS HAVE PICTURES SHOWING MRS. MINH WITH HUONG.) I ASKED IF MINH MIGHT RETURN TO VIET NAM BEFORE THE ELECTION. HUONG SAID THIS IS UNLIKELY BECAUSE THE RULING GENERALS ARE ALL JUNIOR TO MINH AND ARE AFRAID OF HIM.

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2. HUONG AVOIDED A DIRECT ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF WHETHER

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HE WOULD USE MINH IN HIS GOVERNMENT IF HE WERE ELECTED. HE REPLIED BY A LONG STATEMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR MILITARY-
CIVILIAN COOPERATION IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT. ACCORDING TO HUONG, THERE ARE 300 VIETNAMESE POLITICAL PARTIES, NONE OF THEM STRONG ENOUGH OR DISCIPLINED ENOUGH TO GIVE A PRESIDENT THE KIND OF BACKING HE NEEDS TO RUN THE COUNTRY. ONLY THE MILITARY CAN DO THAT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MILITARY CANNOT RULE WITHOUT CIVILIAN HELP.

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3. ASKED ABOUT HIS CAMPAIGN PLANS, HUONG NOTED THAT HE HAS ALREADY TAPED ALL OF HIS RADIO SPEECHES AND ONE TELEVISION APPEARANCE. HE IS MAKING NO PROMISES IN HIS SPEECHES BECAUSE THE PEOPLE DO NOT BELIEVE PROMISES ANYHOW. THE COUNTRY SUFFERS FROM A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE. KY MADE 26 PROMISES WHEN HE CAME TO OFFICE, BUT NONE OF THEM HAVE BEEN KEPT. ALL OF THE CANDIDATES WILL BE SAYING MUCH THE SAME SORT OF THING, BUT THE PEOPLE WILL NOT PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO WHAT IS SAID. HUONG ALSO NOTED THAT HE WILL HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE AUGUST 3 AND THAT HE PLANS TO TRAVEL TO THE PROVINCES. LY QUY CHUNG, MRS LEADER IN THE ASSEMBLY AND A PRINCIPAL HUONG BACKER, TOLD EMBOFF THAT HUONG WILL NOT GO TO QUANG TRI AS IT IS TOO NEAR THE DMZ AND THEREFORE INSECURE. HUONG WILL GO TO HUE AND SEVERAL OTHER CITIES IN THE CENTER AND WILL VISIT ALL OF THE PROVINCES IN THE DELTA, HOWEVER.

4. HUONG SAID THAT HE KNOWS FOR CERTAIN THAT WORD-OF-MOUTH ORDERS HAVE GONE TO PROVINCE CHIEFS AND DISTRICT CHIEFS TO RIG THE ELECTION IN FAVOR OF THIEU-KY. SOME OF THE PROVINCE AND DISTRICT CHIEFS ARE FORMER STUDENTS OF HIS, AND THEY HAVE

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INFORMED HIM ABOUT THESE ORDERS. HE THEREFORE THINKS HIS CHANCES OF WINNING ARE "VERY SLIM". NEVERTHELESS HE IS DETERMINED TO STAY IN THE RACE. HE DIDN'T WANT TO RUN, BUT WAS PREVAILED UPON TO RUN BY HIS FRIENDS AND STUDENTS. ASKED

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HOW HE EXPECTS THIEU-KY SUPPORTERS TO ATTEMPT TO RIG THE ELECTION, HUONG SAID THAT IN REMOTE AREAS THE BALLOT BOXES WILL BE SWITCHED, IN SOME PLACES HAMLET CHIEFS WILL SIMPLY CAST THE BALLOTS FOR THEIR ENTIRE HAMLETS, AND TROOPS ON OPERATIONS WILL HAVE THEIR BALLOTS CAST FOR THEM. HE SAID THAT THESE AND OTHER TACTICS WERE USED IN THE DIEM REGIME, AND HE FEARS THAT THEY WILL BE EMPLOYED AGAIN.

5. AT ONE POINT, HUONG SAID THAT REGARDLESS OF WHAT THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CATHOLIC GREATER SOLIDARITY FORCE MAY DECIDE, THE MAJORITY OF THE RANK AND FILE MEMBERSHIP WILL VOTE FOR HIM. HE CLAIMS THAT HE WILL GET 70 TO 80 PER CENT OF THE CATHOLIC VOTE. ASKED ABOUT THE HOA HAO VOTE, HE MADE A SOUR FACE AND OBSERVED THAT KY HAD TRIED TO BUY THE HOA HAO. LUONG TRONG TUONG AND LE PHUOC SANG ARE FOR SALE TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER. HOWEVER THE HOA HAO ARE BADLY SPLIT,

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AND IT IS NOT SURE THAT TUONG AND SANG CAN DELIVER MUCH IN THE WAY OF VOTES.

6. HUONG BELIEVES THAT KY DOES NOT WANT TO BE VICE PRESIDENT. KY WANTS TO BE PRESIDENT, OR FAILING THAT, PRIME MINISTER. KY WILL THEREFORE USE HIS CAMPAIGN MACHINE IN SUPPORT OF ANOTHER CANDIDATE IN RETURN FOR BEING NAMED PRIME MINISTER. EMBOFF COMMENTED THAT HE HAD HEARD THIS RUMOR BUT THINKS IT ALMOST CERTAINLY UNTRUE. HUONG SAID THAT HE BELIEVES IT. EMBOFF ASKED IF KY HAD MADE ANY SUCH OFFER TO HUONG. HUONG SAID NO, AND HE NOTED THAT IF HE IS PRESIDENT THE PRIME MINISTER WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO RUN THE GOVERNMENT AS HE PLEASES. IF HUONG IS ELECTED, THE PRIME MINISTER WILL HAVE TO HONOR THE CONSITUTION AND THE LAWS, AND THE PRESIDENT WILL MAKE THE DECISIONS.

7. COMMENT: A. BIG MINH'S SUPPORT SHOULD HELP HUONG. IT IS DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE HOW MUCH STRENGTH MINH'S SUPPORT WILL BRING TO HUONG, HOWEVER, AND WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT IT MAY NOT BE VERY GREAT UNLESS MINH OR HIS WIFE

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ACTIVELY CAMPAIGNS FOR HUONG. IT SEEMS QUITE UNLIKELY THAT MINH WILL BE ALLOWED TO RETURN AND CAMPAIGN FOR HUONG EVEN IF HE IS SO INCLINED.

B. HUONG'S COMMENTS ON THE ORDERS TO PROVINCE AND DISTRICT CHIEFS AND HIS STATED BELIEF THAT KY WILL THROW HIS SUPPORT TO ANOTHER CANDIDATE, THUS SABOTAGING THE THIEU-KY TICKET, APPEAR SOMEWHAT CONTRADICTORY. WE ARE NOT INCLINED TO PUT TOO MUCH STOCK IN EITHER STORY.

C. ALTHOUGH HUONG WILL LIKELY GET A GOOD CHUNK OF THE CATHOLIC VOTE, WE SERIOUSLY DOUBT HE WILL GET HALF OF IT, MUCH LESS THE 70 TO 80 PER CENT HE SAID HE EXPECTS.
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